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How to Backtrack and Get Ahead

DIANETICS: The Modern Science of Mental Health. By L. Ron Hubbard. Introduction by J. A. Winter. 452 pp. New York: Hermitage House. 14.

By ROLLO MAY

ON the first page of "Dianetics" L. Ron Hubbard states that as a result of the theories presented in this book the "hidden source of all psychosomatic ills and human aberration has been discovered and skills have been developed for their invariable cure." A book which makes such claims needs to be scrutinized carefully.

If dianetics — the author's name for his "science of the mind"—justifies these claims, it should, of course, be accepted and embraced gratefully as a forward step in a field where new discoveries are of the greatest importance. If the new theory does not justify its claims, careful scrutiny should serve to minimize the harm the theory may do and help us learn from its errors how better to pursue the goals of mental health.

Dianetics, says Hubbard (whose publishers describe him as "mathematician and theoret-

ful though unconscious impressions on a person.

But what is new in this theory is the bizarre length to which these hypotheses are carried. For example, the author holds that "engrams" may be impressed on the foetus not only in its pre-natal state in general but even in the first few weeks after conception. Hence he points out the dangers of adverse influences on the foetus by intercourse between the parents during pregnancy.

Tremendous promises are made about what dianetics can do for one and the very simple way it can be used. It not only

more than brief illustration, and the careful investigator is left with no possibility of studying these cases to discover what actually happened. As far as one can tell from the data given, the therapy consists of oversimplified forms of regular psychotherapy together with some vaguely hypnotic suggestion—though the author goes to great lengths to insist that dianetics is not hypnosis.

THE importance of "Dianetics," in this reviewer's judgment, is that it so clearly illustrates the most common fallacy of our time in regard to psychological ills. This is the fallacy of trying to construct a simple science of human behavior based upon mathematics and using for its models the physical sciences and the machine.

In the seventeenth century one mathematical genius, Pascal, warned against that incipient tendency: he proclaimed that human beings are so complex that they can be understood only by laws of "probability" and never by the invariable laws of calculus and geometry.



ical philosopher"), is an exact science like physics and chemistry, though far simpler than those sciences, and its application is on the order of engineering. The theory is based on the assumption that all aberrations of human conduct come from "engrams," which are impressions of stimuli—or events—made on the protoplasm of the tissue of a cell. The "analytical mind"—by which is apparently meant man's rational capacity—is described by Hubbard as like a computing machine, mathematical in its accuracy; it never errs except as wrong data is fed into it.

The "reactive mind" is where psychological trouble begins. Here engrams accumulate in the form of "memory banks" and cause aberrations. In therapy the auditor, or therapist, helps the patient to get at the engrams by "returning," which is Hubbard's term for the recalling and re-experiencing of past events. "To 'erase' an engram means to recount it until it has vanished entirely." The final goal of therapy is that the "engram bank" be completely discharged; then the person is "clear" of aberrations and psychosomatic ills.

WHEN we scrutinize that



From a woodcut by Frans Maerel in "Passionate Journey."

is supposed to eliminate any psychosomatic illness from which you suffer (e.g., "cleared" persons never get colds), and to help you "achieve at least one-third more than present capacity for work and happiness," but it also is held to raise your I. Q. substantially.

Furthermore, achieving all of this is not difficult: "The technique of dianetic therapy is basically simple and can be understood and applied to each other by any two reasonably intelligent people after a brief study of this volume." A few weeks of this therapy is held to equal several years of psychoanalysis, except that the person who has had dianetic therapy is certain not to relapse. One wonders at

But such warnings have been of little avail against the power of the ideal of the machine; behaviorism and conditioned reflex therapy are other examples in our century of how this oversimplified view of man crops up again and again.

In this book Hubbard often inveighs against shock therapy and psychosurgery—and one can sympathize with his intent at these points. But he does not see that the excessive use of shock therapy and surgical mutilation of the brain are based on the same assumptions as his own theory—namely, the oversimplification of complex human ailments and the endeavor to heal these ailments by mechanical methods.

EVEN Freud, whose profound insights into the depths of human ills are not to be compared with the superficial theories in this book, partly succumbed to the attraction of the machine in his early view of man as propelled by chemical-physical drives. It has required long and patient effort on the part of succeeding students of human behavior to arrive at the objective realization of the fact that man is a creature who lives in a social world, a creature who is responsible in ways a machine

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WHEN we scrutinize that terminology, we note that Hubbard is applying new words to some common phenomena long accepted in standard psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. "Clear" is roughly parallel to the term "clarified" in psychotherapy, and "returning" is another name for the recall of early experiences such as occurs in psychoanalysis. The "engram" theory is simply a new hypothesis for something long recognized, namely, that early events may leave power-

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The author continually states that these theories are all scientifically proved, that they are as invariable in their application as mathematical laws. But one searches in vain throughout the four hundred pages of this volume for scientific proof or evidence. Reference is often made to the 270 cases on which dianetic therapy has been tried, all of which were supposed to be entirely cured.

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Books like this do harm by their grandiose promises to troubled persons and by their oversimplification of human psychological problems. This harm may be partially offset if such writings demonstrate to us again the absurdity of trying to view man as a machine, and encourage us to make of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis broad sciences of human relations.